



UNITED STATES ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY  
REGION 5  
77 WEST JACKSON BOULEVARD  
CHICAGO, IL 60604-3590

APR 19 2004

REPLY TO THE ATTENTION OF

B-19J



Troy Brady  
Environmental Project Manager  
Section of Environmental Analysis  
Surface Transportation Board  
1925 K Street, NW  
Washington, DC 20423-0001

Re: Finance Docket No. 34395, *City of Peoria, IL, d/b/a Peoria, Peoria Heights & Western Railroad - Construction of Connecting Track Exemption*

Dear Mr. Brady:

In accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), the Council on Environmental Quality's NEPA Implementing Regulations (40 CFR 1500-1508), and Section 309 of the Clean Air Act, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (U.S. EPA) has reviewed an Environmental Assessment (EA) from the Surface Transportation Board (STB) dated March 9, 2004. The EA addresses a petition offered by the City of Peoria, IL, d/b/a Peoria, Peoria Heights & Western Railroad (PPHW) to construct connecting track in Peoria, Illinois.

PPHW proposes to construct approximately 1,800 feet of track in Peoria over land that it owns or over which it has an easement for railroad purposes. The newly-constructed track would connect a 1.9-mile segment of track that the City of Peoria purchased from Union Pacific Railroad Company with an 8.29-mile segment of track known as the Keller Branch acquired from the Chicago, Rock Island & Pacific Railroad Company. PPHW believes the proposed action will enhance operating efficiencies by diverting train traffic over this new section of connecting track instead of using the Keller Branch which runs through the City and utilizes 26 highway/rail at-grade crossings. Pedestrian and vehicular safety will also be enhanced by the closure of the 26 highway-rail at-grade crossings.

The proposed alignment is located adjacent to an active light industrial area in which no residences are located. However, the proposed rail alignment would result in the construction of a new at-grade crossing and the re-activation of an existing highway/rail at-grade crossing. PPHW has agreed to institute several grade crossing safety measures as requested by the Illinois Commerce Commission. PPHW projects that approximately one or two trains per week with one or two cars per train would operate over the at-grade crossings. Level of Service criteria was used to determine that the proposed rail extension would not result in adverse transportation impacts at the proposed at-grade crossings.

Pursuant to a review of this document, we have the following comments regarding driveway relocation and revegetation of disturbed areas. Given the short distance between the proposed University Street grade crossing and the northwest driveway on University Street, consideration has been given to closure of this driveway. Driveway relocation to have a minimum of 200 ft. distance from the centerline of the proposed railroad crossing would be considered as traffic volumes increase on University Street. We recommend the impacts of this possible relocation be considered as part of this project. This type of analysis would aid in identifying the significance of those impacts and the appropriate type and level of mitigation required, if any.

Property immediately to the north of the proposed rail construction, owned by AmerenCILCO, is landscaped with prairie grasses. The majority of the landscaped area falls outside the limits of the proposed construction; however, a portion which falls within the proposed right-of-way (ROW) will be disturbed during construction. We recommend revegetating this area and all portions of exposed soil within the ROW with native prairie grasses. Long-term benefits of this activity include stormwater and soil protection, improved aesthetics, and reduced maintenance and herbicide application once native vegetation becomes established.

Lastly, we commend the decision by the City of Peoria to seek authority from the STB to abandon 6.7 miles of the Keller Branch for development of a recreational trail and removal of 26 crossings. Conversion of the Keller Branch would serve as the final link to complete the 27-mile Rock Island State Trail and enable residents to experience urban, prairie, wooded, and agricultural environments as they explore the trails.

We appreciate having the opportunity to review and comment upon this proposed action and look forward to receiving the STB's final decision. Should you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me or Kathleen Kowal of my staff at (312) 353-5206 or via e-mail at [kowal.kathleen@epa.gov](mailto:kowal.kathleen@epa.gov).

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Kenneth A. Westlake", written over a horizontal line.

Kenneth A. Westlake, Chief  
Environmental Planning and Evaluation Branch